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ABSTRACT

The didactic principles determining the structure, general direction, methods, and results of the process of foreign language instruction in the Soviet Union are outlined and discussed. Didactics are defined as the branch of pedagogy concerning the process of teaching in relation to its content and giving a scientific basis to teaching practice. The linguistic, psychological, and didactic (pedagogical) bases of foreign language instruction are examined in relation to both the professional literature and current Soviet practice. It is concluded that a major characteristic of Soviet practice is the avoidance of the use of the native language. In vocabulary development, visual presentation is preferred at the lower levels, and verbal presentation is preferred at higher levels. Three main stages in foreign language instruction are distinguished, each with its own specific teaching methods. The stage considered most important is the first, with very favorable learning conditions provided and with two basic approaches: simultaneous introduction of the four language skills, or oral language taught first. The syllabus for each level is prescribed by the state. The primary concern among teaching professionals is to find the optimum learning conditions for mastery of the language being taught. (MSE)

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RESEARCH BULLETIN 63

Lyyli Ronkonen

REALIZATION OF DIDACTIC PRINCIPLES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SOVIET SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to inform readers of the principles of foreign language teaching in Soviet schools. As there is an increasing interest in the Soviet education system in the world, the author has made an attempt to give a brief outline ot the general didactic principles applied to foreign language teaching in Soviet schools.

When dealing with educational systems in different countries one of the main problems concerns the terminology. The term "didactics", for example, has slightly different meanings in different countries and there is also a tendency to avoid the term itself. However, this term is often used in Soviet pedagogics and its meaning may slightly differ from that in western interpretation. Considering this, the author starts the article with the discussion of the term of "didactics" in Soviet understanding and interpretation.

The main object of discussion in this article is the analysis of the didactic principles that have become the ruling ideas and directives in determining the structure, general direction, methods and results of the process of foreign language teaching in Soviet schools.

1 DIDACTICS IN SOVIET INTERPRETATION

In the history and even in modern pedagogical literature we can find different interpretations of the notion of didactics. In pedagogical literature didactics is usually interpreted as the contents and organization of the teaching process. More concretely, the term concerns the aim, contents, laws, methods and principles of teaching. These problems are studied not only by didactics but also by philosophy, sociology, psychology etc. In teaching practice not only the laws of didactics function but also the laws of psychology, physiology, the laws of information handling that is studied by cybernetics - and all of them influence teaching practice.

According to the Soviet scientist Kraevski's definition didactics is a branch of pedagogics studying the process of teaching in its relation to the contents of it (Kraevski 1982, 7). However, aim of didactics is not restricted to the interpretation of teaching practice. It influences this practice helping the teacher to change and to improve his methods of teaching.

Thus, the main function of didactics is to give scientific basis to teaching practice and this should be considered of primary importance in defining the subject of didactics (Kraevski 1982, 10).

As it has been mentioned above, teaching practice is the main object of the study of didactics, methods, psychology and cybernetics, all of them investigating different aspects to the teaching process. Didactics is concerned with the general didactic principles that are realized by the teacher. In the course of social development teaching forms one of its specific features, the nature and aim of which is to transfer social experience to the growing generation.

With the help of teaching the young generation is prepared to become an active participant of social life.

In latest didactic investigations the contents of teaching and the teaching process are usually linked and discussed as an inseparable whole demanding the same systematic approach. With its growing theoretical level didactics is able to influence more effectively teaching practice, improving and changing it.

In the teaching process various relations can be observed, such as teacher - pupil, pupil - teaching material, pupil-other pupils etc. There exist different opinions in pedagogics as to these relations and their links with didactics. If teaching is regarded as the transferrence of social experience to the growing generation - the main and specific feature of this social activity is teaching and studying: teaching as the social activity of the teachers, and studying - as that of the learners. As a result of this, the unity of teaching and learning defines and organizes the whole system of didactic relations and their concrete realization (Kraevski 1982, 15). It organizes also the mental activity of the pupils. These relations are characteristic of didactics which can be defined as the pedagogical theory of teaching, aimed at substantiating and directing teaching practice.

Another specific feature of didactics is the unity of teaching and educating. The process of teaching includes the pupils' general education, morality, behaviour, his world outlook and finally, his whole personality.

As it has been already mentioned, didactics regards teaching as a special kind of social activity. From this point of view, teaching is an activity aimed at the realization of social order. Didactics considers teaching and general education, the formation of the pupil's

personality as a unique whole. The subject of didactics, according to Kraevski, is a link and interrelation of teaching and learning (Kraevski 1982, 6).

The Soviet investigator of the methods of teaching foreign languages Rogova gives a more general definition of didactics: "To study foreign language teaching one must know pedagogics. One branch of pedagogics is called didactics. Didactics studies general ways of teaching in schools. Methods, as compared to didactics, studies the specific ways of teaching a definite subject. Thus, it may be considered special didactics. In the foreign language teaching, as well as in the teaching of mathematics, history, and other subjects taught in school general principles of didactics are applied and, in their turn, influence and enrich didactics " (Rogova 1983, 6).

Soviet didactics investigates various forms and kinds of the teaching process as well as its connection with education and the formation of the pupils' personality. The principles of general didactics are realized in teaching practice through methods of teaching, which gives concrete interpretation and practical forms to these principles.

2 FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SOVIET SCHOOLS

The aim and content of teaching foreign languages is reflected in a state document, i.e. the foreign language syllabus. Every school gets a curriculum that states the number of hours allotted to the study of each subject. In the Soviet Union there are different types of schools which have different curricula of foreign language teaching.

At the ordinary ten-year school foreign language is taught for seven years, beginning in the 4 th form and finishing in the 10 th form. According to the curriculum, the number of hours is the greatest in the 4 th form and it becomes smaller in the senior forms. Nowadays the number of hours for foreign language is the following:

4 th form - 4 hours a week,
5 th " - 3 " " "
6 th " - 2 " " "
7 th " - 2 " " "
8 th " - 1 " " "
9 th " - 1 " " "
10 " " - 1 " " "

Besides that in senior stage pupils may have additional ours allotted for an optional course.

Foreign languages are taught much more extensively in specialized schools, i.e. schools functioning mostly in cities and towns, at which a number of subjects is taught in the foreign language. In these specialized schools pupils learn a foreign language for nine years. They begin in the 2nd form and complete their foreign language studies in the 10 th form. The total number of hours allotted to a foreign language is almost three times as much as in ordinary ten - year schools.

Besides that a foreign language is taught at evening schools, where it is taught as an optional subject for three years - in the 9 th, 10 th and 11 th forms.

The curriculum states the total number of hours allotted to foreign language studies, and the number of weekly hours in each. The syllabus reflects the aims of teaching, the extent of knowledge, habits and skills that are expected of the pupil, it lays down also the sequence of topics constituting the content of the subject.

Every teacher is responsible for the fulfilment of the requirements of the syllabus, he cannot make any alterations in it. The syllabus as a state document is uniform for all teachers working at certain types of schools.

To help the teacher in the fulfilment of its requirements the syllabus includes explanatory notes where the teacher finds methodic material, such as suggestions about the approach to teaching different aspects of language, indications about the pupils' independent work and homework. In the syllabus the teacher finds the requirements for the command of knowledge in English, German and French languages, that are mainly taught at schools. Thus, the syllabus is the most important state document for schools, in which the teacher can find all the instructions concerning his everyday work. As to the textbooks and teaching materials used at lessons - they correspond to the syllabus. Whenever requirements of the programme change all textbooks undergo changes as well.

3 DIDACTIC PRINCIPLES AS BASIS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Foreign language teaching as the teaching of any other subject at school is based on the fundamental principles of didactics. These principles of didactics are, in fact, scientifically based teaching ideas accumulating the results of long teaching experience. The positive value of didactics as science lies in its attempt to provide foreign language the theoretical foundation for teaching practice and to unite different pedagogic rules and ideas into a logical and effective system of didactic principles. These didactic principles have become the ruling ideas and directives in determining the structure, general direction, methods and results of the process of teaching.

The didactic principles are aimed at facilitating effectiveness in teaching and at applying the knowledge, received in teaching, to practical life.

The realization of the didactic principles in school teaching helps to develop the pupil's personality - his mental and physical build-up.

In foreign language teaching, as well as in the teaching of other subjects at school, the general principles of didactics are applied. Foreign language teaching, in its turn, influences the development of didactic principles. For example, the principle of visualization came from foreign language teaching. Later on it became one of the basic principles of didactics and is used in teaching all other subjects at school.

Principles of foreign language teaching methods are based on the results of scientific investigations of such subjects as linguistics, general didactics, psychology and psycholinguistics - a new branch of science born on the borderline of psychology and linguistics dealing with the mechanisms of speech producing and speech understanding. As linguistics, psychology, pedagogics and psycholinguistics are most inseparably connected with the methods of foreign language teaching, they are regarded as the main sciences on which the principles of methods are based.

3.1 Linguistic basis

Connections between linguistics and methods of teaching languages are based on the fact taht methods makes use of the ideas and rules of linguistics as the latter determines the specific nature of the object of learning. It's very important for methods to draw a borderline between the notions of language and speech.
Language is regarded in linguistics as a system of linguistic means needed for communication and the rules of its usage. Speech in its turn is looked upon as the realization of language system in concrete acts of communication.

It is most important for methods of teaching languages to take into account the difference between the notions of language and speech as the knowledge of the language system is not enough for communication. For the practical use of the language in oral speech the knowledge of its rules and laws is not enough, one should master the automatic use of them also in the process of communication.

In the process of learning languages a student should not only learn and memorize the laws and rules of a certain language, but also acquire the habit of using them in the process of communication - in oral speech.

The differentiation of the notions of language and speech determines the distinction between the language and speech units. To language units belong such units as phonemes, morphemes, words, sentences - i.e. units characteristic of different spheres of the language system - phonetics, morphology, semantics etc.

Speech units are different from them as they contain a complete idea or notion needed for communication. Speech units may have different forms - they can be in the form of a text (including macrotext or microtext, the latter reproducing the shortest possible dialogue), sentence or syntagm, which is, according to the Soviet academician Ščerba, the smallest unit of speech, no more divisible, used for the shortest utterance in the process of communication (Ščerba 1974, 176).

This division of the language and speech units is significant for methods as it enables the teacher to define the difficulties the students experience in the process of learning different aspects of the foreign language. Linguistics gives material for studying language units - words, phonemes, morphemes etc.

At the same time the knowledge of the specific features of speech units enables us to select language material for active and passive reproduction. We may say that without the knowledge of linguistic ans speech units it is difficult to organize effective studies of foreign languages.

In connection with linguistic basis of foreign language teaching methods we should take into account also the linguistic models used in teaching. Linguists define two types of models - nonstatic (or basic) linguistic models and static (stochastic) models, that correspond to different approaches to language functions in speech.

We may investigate the language from the point of view ot its origin and function in oral speech in the process of communication or we may investigate the different elements of the language from the point of view of the frequency of their usage.

Different mathematic methods are used for language models. For static models, for example, the methods of static mathematics, - the theory of information and the calculus of probability are used. For nonstatic models the methods of mathematic logics, the theory of plurality and theory of graphs are used (Miroljubov 1982, 25).

We should take also into consideration the fact that there exists a certain hierarchy between basic models and speech models - all effective speech models should be based on basic linguistic models(both of them branches of structural linguistics).

The formation of different kinds of language models is of great importance for foreign language teaching methods. They help to define the peculiarities of different language materials and to choose correct, appropriate teaching material for different grades of language learners.

Basic models are used in forming sentences. They are, in fact, abstractions that characterize the final structure of the sentence. Usually they may be defined in the formula A+B+C where A corresponds to the notion of the subject of the sentence, B-predicate and C-direct object. In foreign language teaching we use concrete sentences instead of such models.

So the structural formula A+B+C may correspond to such real sentences as "The pupil is writing a letter", "The worker is driving a car".

Sentences of speech patterns reflecting certain models may contain a great variety of different meanings and grammar forms. With the development of structural linguistics the use of speech models in teaching foreign languages is acquiring great importance.

Grammar, for example, is widely taught through grammar pattern practice. This pattern practice with varying elements drills the student in conscious application of structural elements leading him to "automatic" use of the structural patterns. These pattern exercises are usually conducted in the form of drills the student substituting words for other words, or making changes in the sentences (for example, from singular to plural, from past to present, from active to passive voice etc.). In each case drilling follows the given model(Rogova 1983,157).

As a rule, grammatical explanations and descriptions of patterns are given after the student has drilled them well enough at a purely oral level. It is assumed that these theoretical explanations will now facilitate the conscious learning process and help ensure retention.

Oral speech patterns and carefully selected situations reproduced mostly by native speakers are widely used in teaching practice. The language material is carefully selected for easy assimilation.

The practical application of the theory of linguistics, the progress made in the sphere of phonetics, vocabulary and grammar has shed fresh light on the content of teaching foreign languages.
In the selection of linguistic material for teaching speaking, reading and writing different approaches are followed.

The language material used in recorded speech, for example, is analysed with the aim of selecting language units characteristic of spoken language.

For teaching reading printed texts are analysed so that the occurrences of words, phraseological units and grammatical structures are counted in orde to select appropriate reading material for learners.

The practical application of some theoretical views of structural linguists has led to the oral approach in teaching foreign languages. Linguistic theories have enriched foreign language teaching methods with new ideas and approaches in handling teaching material.

In foreign language teaching we should take into consideration also the influence of the pupil's mother tongue which may be positive or negative simultaneously. It's positive influence may be strengthened by revealing the linguistic contacts between languages as there always exist common phenomena in two systems of languages. At the same time mother tongue may have negative influence which is called in linguistics "interference". It means that the students mechanically transfer and apply the norms ans laws of the mother tongue to the foreign language (Miroljubov 1982, 26).

To avoid this, methods should be devised to consider the peculiarities of the two languages through the phenomenon of transferrence reducing interference.

Thus, methods of foreign language teaching is closely connected with linguistics as the latter deals with such aspects as language and thinking, grammar, vocabulary and the relationship between vocabulary and grammar. Besides that, the results of linguistic investigations in the selection and organization of language material are successfully used in the methods of foreign language teaching.

The structural school of linguistics has also a great impact on teaching foreign languages, as it prepares teaching materials. Besides that, prominent theoreticians of linguistics try to apply their individual linguistic theories to foreign language teaching.

3.2 Psychological basis

Methods of foreign language teaching has a definite relation to psychology.

Psychological investigations give much valuable material and information explaining the mechamisms of foreign language teaching. N. I. Žinkin, a Soviet psychologist, investigating the mechanisms of speech has proved that words and rules of using them are dormant in the kinetic center of the brain. A signal received by the ear reaches the hearing center of the brain after which it passes on to the kinetic center (Žinkin 1958, 132).

It is most important that pupils should hear and speak a foreign language thus making both centers (hearing and kinetic) function simultaniously. Accordingly, the teacher's aim at school is to make the pupils hear and speak the foreign language.

It is most important to develop the pupils' memory in foreign language teaching. According to the Soviet psychologist P. K. Žintšenko, two types of memories are equally used while learning a foreign language, voluntary and involuntary memory. In her investigations Žintšenko has proved that involuntary memory is retentive (Žintšenko 1968, 48).

That is why in teaching foreign languages it is most important to create conditions for developing this type of memory. Involuntary memorizing, according to Žintšenko is possible when pupils have to solve some mental problems dealing with the linguistic material that should be memorized. Comparative experiments on voluntary and involuntary memory have proved that involuntary memory may be more retentive under certain circumstances than voluntary memory. Thus, psychological investigations of the mechanism of foreign language learning and memorizing language material help to work out the didactic principles for effective teaching.

Methods of foreign language teaching are related also to the physiology of the higher nervous system, to Pavlov's theories of "conditioned reflexes". Pavlov's experimental work on the conditioned reflexes has a great impact on pedagogics in general and foreign language studies in particular.

Pavlovs' theories of "conditioned reflexes", the "second signalling system" and of the "dynamic stereotype" are closely related to foreign language studies. A conditioned reflex, according to Pavlov, is an automatically performed action in response to a definite stimulus, the former being the result of frequent repetition of the same action. According to this theory frequent repetition and revision of teaching material are the principal methods of foreign language teaching.

According to Pavlov, man's higher nervous activities, i.e. speaking and thinking, are the characteristic functions of organic structures within the nervous system.

The system of organic structures within the nervous system enables the brain to respond to inner and outer stimuli.

This is the second signalling system (as it has been named by Pavlov). According to all this, language behaviour constitutes one of the main forms of human behaviour, and namely speech response to different forms of communication.

Thus, while learning a foreign language students should acquire it as behaviour, as a means of communication in various situations of intercourse. So Pavlov's theories provide the basis for many important principles of language teaching.

Among other things it gives the foundation to the behavioural method of teaching. This method advocates the combination of a correct and systematic build-up of linguistic elements with a vital and behavioural use of the language. Linguistic elements include structures and carefully selected vocabulary. In this case very real and close-to-real situations are created.

The situational approach is essential in foreign language teaching, if we use the behavioural method. According to the American scientist M. West, in order to understand English it is not enough to know what the Englishman speaks, but how they converse (West 1960, 8).

According to modern American descriptive structural linguists and psychologists, language is treated as a complex of habits and skills or as a form of social behaviour. Behaviourism means a reaction of the organism as a whole to the social environment. Thus, the foreign language student should know in the process of learning what a native speakers' response would be in a certain situation of communication.

The behaviouristic stimulus - response theory in psychology has a great impact on foreign language teaching - it has resulted in repetitive drills of certain language patterns.

Many innovations have been offered in this connection - programmed instruction, language laboratories etc. But the results were less than expected. The American methodologists Bull W. E. and Lamadrid E. E. criticize the new methods of teaching, proposed by theoretical linguistics in the 1950's, considering that the audio-lingual method has not lived up to the expectations and the language laboratories have not become efficient replacements for living teachers (Bull & Lamadrid 1971, 449).

The behaviouristic stimulus - response theory was later criticized by psychologists and as a result this theory was substituted by the cognitive code - learning theory, according to which language cannot be regarded only as a system of habits that are formed through repetitive drill. The learner of the language should know how this specific system works in actual communication. As Anna-Liisa Leino says, the cognitive code-learning theory is based on the presumption that foreign language learning is a conscious process when the student understands all forms and constructions he uses in speech (Leino 1981, 109).

According to the Soviet ingestigator Rogova G. V. "Cognitive processes imply recognition of form, perception of meaning, relations of universals and particulars, generalization and analogization. Since the cognitive code-learning approach is characterized by the use of exercises to teach grammatical understanding of the concepts being introduced: by the deductive explanation of all grammar prior to any practice with the structure and by the practice of all language skills from the beginning of the course, it is considered a more modern and sophisticated version of the grammar - translation method" (Rogova 1983, 30).

The psychological basis of foreign language teaching methods is important in different kinds of tests and measures of the pupils' aptitudes and achievements in learning languages. But the problem of testing is far from being

solved, as most of the tests used for measuring the pupils' knowledge of vocabulary and structures, their understanding of oral and written language are primitive and inadequate. Nowadays investigations are being carried out for improving scientific psychological basis of testing.

We should bear in mind the fact that the relations between psychology and the methods of teaching foreign languages have two cardinal directions - the psychology of speech and pedagogical psychology.

Psychologists define written and oral speech as two different kinds of speech that should be approached differently in the process of learning.

The Soviet psychologist Lurija A. R. considers that it is wrong to suppose that oral speech and written speech constitute the same kind of speech expressed only in two different forms. According to A. R. Lurija, written language is a peculiar psychological formation differing from oral speech in its origin, structure and function (Lurija 1959, 543).
Written speech and oral speech have different channels of information. In written language we use a graphic channel with space measuring, in oral speech - an audio channel with temporal measuring. There is a certain difference also as to the origin of both types of speech. Oral speech is primary, basic in its relation to written speech. Differences can be traced also in the structure of both types of speech. Written and oral languages have quite different grammar and lexical forms, their own peculiarities of style. These differences are essential for methods of teaching as they require quite different ways of teaching, and the selection of quite different teaching material.

Nowadays it is generally assumed that the development of reading and writing should be based on linguistic material that the student has learned orally. Thus, oral

speech is of primary importance. Reading and writing is taught after students have acquired habits and skills in hearing and speaking.

According to C. Fries, even if the final desire of the learner is only to read in the foreign language, he must master the fundamentals of the language, such as the sound system with a limited vocabulary through speech. Fries considers that the written record is but a secondary representation of the language (Fries 1947, 10).

Reading should be postponed until the student grasps firmly the structure of the new language.

The "oral approach" method in language teaching relies on every means contributing to learning the language- records, sound films, manuals, textbooks, written notes and exercises.

An important factor for methods is also the difference between outer and inner speech, analyzed by psychologists. Outer speech preserves all language elements and forms, as for inner speech - it is represented in fragments and curtailments. As the process of reading, writing, pronouncing and speaking are connected also with inner speech, with its fragmentary and curtailed forms, it is most important to drill the students in doing oral exercises.

An important factor in language teaching is also the difference between receptive and reproductive or active and passive speech. Receptive speech and reproductive speech are essentially different as the process of receptive speech moves from the forms of language to thought and the whole process is called analytical but the process of reproductive speech moves from thought to its linguistic forms and the operations during this process are called synthetic.

Besides these differences of the cognitive processes, there is a great difference in linguistic materials, too. Usually the linguistic material of a reproductive operation is called active, and a receptive operation - passive. It is a generally assumed fact that even in the native language passive vocabulary and accordingly the whole passive linguistic material is much more extensive than the active material. Considering the difference between these two kinds of language it is most important to choose the language material for active and passive knowledge. Accordingly the problem is what linguistic material students should retain.

Both, active and passive linguistic material, must be carefully selected according to the principles of selection and the conditions of teaching the language. Scientific principles of selecting language material have been worked out. For example, in selecting vocabulary the selected words should be frequently used in the language, easily combined (a nice girl, dress, weather etc.). They should be valuable from the point of view of word-building (use - useless - useful etc.), unlimited from the point of view of style etc.

The problem of word selection was thoroughly investigated in the USSR by I. V. Rahmaninov and his colleagues in APS RSFS in the 1950's. As a result of this work, vocabularies, or lists of words, called "mini-vocabulary" and "vocabulary of most frequently used words" (Slovarj-minimum and "slovarj naibolee upotrebitelnyh slow") appeared (Rogova 1983, 132). The problem of word values has been studied also in the works of Thorndike and Horn in the USA, H. Palmer in Japan, M. West in India, E. Richards and C. K. Ogden in England.

But the selection of vocabulary is not the teacher's chief concern, his concern should be "how" to make his students assimilate the linguistic material. This main

problem is still in the process of being solved.

3.3 Didactic basis

Every school subject has its specific nature determining the peculiarities of the didactic principles forming the basis of its methods. In this connection it is most important to define the notion "foreign language" as a school subject. Foreign language as a school subject differs greatly from many other subjects at school (mathematics, physics, biology etc.) as its aim is to teach the pupils to communicate in a foreign tongue, it means that its main function is communicative. Studying a foreign language, the student forms a new system of communication which is used only at the lessons as the teacher comes out as the repository of the language he teaches.

Thus, the main aim of the teacher should be the realization of the communicative function in teaching the foreign language. Other educational aims are solved simultaneously and seemed of secondary importance. But experienced and highly qualified teachers manage to lend every lesson great educational value.

One of the most important principles of didactics is scientific approach to the subject taught. It means that the teaching process is organised in accordance with the scientific basis and scientific theories of the respective subject. The students should know the main scientific tendencies and directions in the development of every school subject. But this principle can hardly be applied to foreign language teaching.

As the main aim is communicative, it is difficult to give the students scientifically based solid knowledge of the linguistic theories of the language. Misunderstanding the principle of scientific approach in teaching, some language teachers are inclined to give extensive theoretical

linguistic material. But it is time consuming and hinders practical knowledge - the communicative function - that is the main aim in language studies.

The educational aim as one of the principles of didactics is achieved mainly with the help of teaching material, which should give valuable information about the country of the target language and its culture. It is assumed also that teaching a foreign language develops the pupils' logical thinking. While reading and analysing the texts, performing exercises, working at the vocabulary the pupils learn to think logically.

The principle of conscious approach to learning as one of the main principles of didactics is applied to foreign language teaching implying the comprehension of language material by the learners. This comprehension is possible either through the medium of the native language or by a certain arrangement of the teaching material graded in terms of difficulty so that the pupils can understand and grasp the whole meaning. In all cases the pupils should understand the material they have to learn and while performing various exercises aiming at developing speech habits and skills, they should know how to treat the teaching material.

Investigations in the field of psychology and methods, carried out by Soviet scientifists, have proved that conscious approach to learning a foreign language promotes the acquisition of the subject.

The Soviet scientist B. V. Belayev, who has made a considerable contribution to foreign language teaching, presents the process of conscious approach to teaching like this:

theory

language ---------- proficiency
practice

According to Belayev, neither theory nor habits can ensure the mastery of the language. But language practice when it is supported by theory develops habits and skills and leads to the mastery of the language (Belayev 1965, 75).

In this connection, it is necessary to discuss the question of forming habits and skills while teaching a foreign language. Language habits and skills are closely connected with the conscious activity of the learners. It is assumed by psychologists (Thyne, Zaporožets etc.) that a habit may be regarded as a dialectical unit of the automatism of consciousness. As to skills, Thyne defines them as an economical organization of behaviour achieving an intended effect (Thyne 1965, 63). Belayev distinguishes two kinds of skills - primary and secondary ones. According to him, primary skills are formed with the help of theory. As to the secondary skills, they imply the use of the material in the act of communication.

In connection with the conscious approach to teaching a foreign language, investigations carried out by P. Y. Galperin and N. F. Talyzina are of primary importance. They have created the theory of stage formation of ideas and intellectual activities when building subjects for a foreign language course. According to this theory, every pupil should pass through several stages in the process of mastering the language. The theory of stage formation as applied to foreign language teaching is now being investigated and studied in the research institutes of the Academy of Ped. Sciences in Moscow USSR (Galperin 1965; Talyzina 1975, 138).

The most important problem nowadays in teaching foreign languages is enlarging the real time available for each pupil during the class-time period to make him an active participant of the lesson. Foreign language teachers and methodologists are searching ways for solving the problem. Many ways for this are recommended nowadays - such as

working in union, mass work, work in small groups, work in pairs, individual work in programmed instruction etc.

In teaching a foreign language the principle of visualization has always been extremely important. Visualization is defined as a specially organized demonstration of linguistic material characteristic of the target language. The aim of visualization is to help the pupil to understand, assimilate and utilize this demonstration in connection with the task set.

Visualization should be extensively used in foreign language teaching as it allows the teacher to create natural conditions for the pupils' oral practice. It can be utilized in teaching almost all aspects of the language: vocabulary, grammar, phonology. Visualization should be extensively used also in developing different language skills, such as hearing speaking, reading and writing.

A great deal of research work has been carried out on the problem of visualization in different countries. Nowadays different audio-visual aids are extensively used in teaching languages and these aids are developing and improving daily. Visualization in teaching languages implies an extensive use of audio-visual aids for the presentation and retention of the teaching material as well as for developing oral and written language skills and habits. But these aids should be used differently depending on different factors of teaching, such as the stage of instruction, the pupils' age, their progress in the target language etc. (Artemov 1969, 226).

The use of visualization awakens the pupils' interest and thought and makes the lessons emotionally coloured providing favourable conditions for the realization of the principle of conscious and active teaching.

In teaching foreign languages some other didactic principles are used, among them most important are such principles as the principle of consecutiveness, of accessability, of durability, the principle of systematic teaching. But all these principles of general didactics have their peculiarities when applied to foreign language teaching and they should be taken into consideration in the process of teaching.

4 DISCUSSION

While applying didactic principles in teaching practice the teacher comes across problems that require everyday practical solution. In teaching vocabulary, for example, the teacher has the task to convey the meaning of new words. There exist different opinions as to the use of the pupils' mother tongue or translation while explaining the new words. Soviet methods favours two ways of conveying the meaning of new words: the direct way and translation. In the direct way the mother tongue is not used. This method is used when the words denote things, objects and their qualities, gestures, movements that can be shown etc. This group of words involves the use of different visual aids to convey the meaning of unfamiliar words. The teacher can utilize also verbal means for conveying the meaning of new words. Verbal means include the context, synonyms, antonyms, definition, worldbuilding elements. There is a great number of techniques the teacher has at his disposal to convey the meaning of unfamiliar words. To test the pupils' comprehension of the new words the teacher asks questions avoiding the use of the pupils' mother tongue. But in explaining some difficult words which can be misunderstood the teacher may also use translation.

It is assumed that this method works well when the teacher is good and skilful at applying visual aids and using verbal means while explaining the new words. The teacher should apply visual aids and use verbal means vividly to make the lesson interesting and to provide optimum conditions for understanding unfamiliar words. But when the teacher is not efficient enough in using the visual aids, he naturally fails in conveying the meaning of the new words to the pupils.

However, the direct way cannot be applied in explaining words denoting abstract notions. In this case the teacher must use translation. It is an apt way for presenting

unfamiliar words, and ensures exact comprehension of their meaning.

In Soviet methods of presenting new words it is assumed that visual aids and visual presentation should prevail in juniour forms, while verbal presentation should prevail in intermediate and senior forms. Translation is used in all forms, but in senior forms it prevails.

According to Rogova, the choice of means for conveying the meaning of unfamiliar words depends on several factors: psychological - pupils' age, for example - for younger pupils it is better to use the direct way. It depends also on the pupils' intelligence - the brighter the pupil the more direct the way.

Pedagogical factors should be also taken into consideration such as the stage of teaching (junior, intermediate, senior), the size of the class - in overcrowded classes translation is preferable, also when pressed for time the teacher turns to translation. Linguistic factors should be also considered - for conveying the meaning of abstract words translation is preferable (Rogova 1983, 143).

The Soviet school distinguishes three main stages in teaching foreign languages - junior (the 4th and the 5th forms), intermediate (the 6th and the 7th forms) and senior (the 8th - 10th) forms.

Each stage has its specific ways of teaching. As a rule, the classes are divided into two groups of about 20 pupils for foreign language lessons.

The most important stage for learning is the junior stage. The conditions for language learning are rather favourable- pupils have four lessons a week in the 4th form and three - in the fifth form. The number of words and phraseological units set by the syllabus for a pupil to assimilate is

450 during this stage (the whole amount according to the syllabus should be approximately 800 - 850 after secondary school).

There are two possible solutions to the way of conducting the introductory course. Considering the fourfold aims set by the syllabus (hearing, speaking, reading and writing) Soviet methods distinguishes two different approaches to the initial course of teaching:

1. Simultaneous teaching of language skills, - oral language (hearing and speaking) and written language (reading and writing) being taught simultaneously from the very beginning.

2. An oral introductory course, oral language being taught first.

The advocates of the first way consider that as language is organic unity, all its activities are intimately related to each other and one phrase of a language helps the other, so that writing helps reading and both of them help speaking.

The whole teaching process combines analysis and synthesis, the pupils get acquainted with all language activities simultaneously. But this approach has its disadvantages - the pupils have to learn too many elements of the language before they can use it in oral speech and many of them get bored and loose interest in learning the language.

The second approach - the oral way of teaching - is considered preferable for the introductory course by most teachers and new contemporary textbooks reflect this approach. This way provides an efficient activization of teaching from the very beginning.

The introductory course is organized so, that teaching reading and writing are postponed for a while, as ability in oral speech can be developed before written language.

An oral introductory course has some undeniable advantages as it permits the teacher to make the pupils understand foreign words and whole sentences and express themselves in a foreign language from the very beginning and it naturally keeps up their interest in studying it. Much attention is given to teaching correct pronunciation. Hearing and speaking are in the focus of teaching and there is a constant communication between the teacher and the pupil. The language material is used in a form suitable for communication (Folomkina 1982, 340).

There exist different opinions as to the duration of the oral introductory course. This problem has not yet been solved. It depends on several factors, as for example - the number of the pupils in the class. In over-crowded classes the oral introductory course should be shorter than in small groups of pupils. The oral course depends also on the pupils' abilities - if the pupils can easily grasp words, phrases and sentences by the ear - the oral introductory course may be prolonged. The teachers' qualification also influences the duration of this course. Experienced and highly qualified teachers are able to teach the pupils longer through hearing ans speaking without using written language.

According to Rogova, the oral introductory course must not be shorter than four weeks (Rogova 1983, 255). But in the contemporary Soviet textbooks for the junior stage by A. P. Starkov, R. R. Dixon and M. D. Rybakov the oral introductory course is extended to a whole term (the first two months).

Soviet teachers are recommended nowadays to keep to the oral introductory course using the textbooks by Starkov, Dixon and Rybakov for the 4th form.

Soviet methods confirms nowadays that the learners should receive their initial contact with the foreign language material through the ear. The same opinion concerning introductory period in teaching languages is shared by foreign language teachers in Western countries. When comparing foreign language teaching in the Soviet Union and other countries, the author finds many similarities in the aims, objects and methods of teaching.

Nowadays the main problem and chief concern of all foreign language teachers is to find optimal conditions for ensuring pupils' good command of the language in its two forms - oral and written (Babanski 1984, 218).

Much work is done in this field in all countries.
Contemporary use of effective audio-visual aids is of great help in solving the problem.
It is a question of prestige for every country nowadays to equip schools with the best possible equipment, audio-visual aids, that are developing daily together with the development of science and technique.

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